



HANDS-ON HELP: Therapist Nicholas Tortoriello works on Panthers center Serge Payer. The MAT system is designed to evaluate and treat muscular imbalances. Photo/Ginny Dixon

Putting muscle into it

Fiedler among local athletes to try new therapy.

BY STEVE GORTEN
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FORT LAUDERDALE • Nicholas Tortoriello thought it was a joke when a caller identified himself as Jay Fiedler. Tortoriello, 33, had never met the Dolphins quarterback before Fiedler dialed him in July, seeking a specialist in a budding yet still relatively unknown form of therapy — Muscle Activation Techniques.

While training in New York during the offseason, Fiedler, through a friend, had met someone who introduced him to MAT, a system designed to evaluate and treat muscular imbalances.

"The experience was totally new to me and I really liked the benefits that came from it," Fiedler said. "You get feedback right away."

So he searched for someone in South Florida who knew the techniques. After doing research on the Internet, Fiedler said, he found Tortoriello. Soon, teammate Junior Seau was also waiting at the team's preseason hotel to be worked on for an hour.

"In this league, what you try to do is catch an edge on health and your physical being," Seau said. "What he tried to do was trigger the muscles when they're damaged. He was able to do that for my hip."

Panthers center Serge Payer, working out at a local fitness club during his sport's lockout, met Tortoriello and has had two sessions with the MAT therapist and biomechanics specialist originally from New Jersey. All three athletes have had previous hip injuries, which led to muscles losing communication with the central nervous system and "shutting down," Tortoriello said.

"After one session, you realize how certain muscles just turn themselves off," Fiedler said. "Immediately, he'll test the muscle and you feel really weak at it, and then all of a sudden, just a little adjustment, he'll test that muscle again and you can just feel it fire right away."

In an era of performance-enhancing drugs, the trio, and other professional athletes nationally, have turned to the performance-enhancing therapy founded by exercise physiologist Greg Roskopf of Denver, a former college football player and

strength and conditioning coach at Fresno State.

"Initially there was a lot of resistance, but it's opening up in the world," Roskopf said.

Former Broncos linebacker Bill Romanowski, who sought out Roskopf seven years ago to help him overcome a knee injury, was so impressed by MAT that he persuaded the Broncos to hire Roskopf to help the entire team. Since then, Roskopf has worked with the Broncos, Denver Nuggets and Utah Jazz, specifically John Stockton, while teaching his techniques to everyone from the Jacksonville Jaguars' head trainer to Tortoriello, who first met Roskopf while taking a biomechanics course in Oklahoma City five years ago.

Tortoriello spent one year studying under Roskopf and is now one of the few certified in a therapy growing in popularity but still often misunderstood.

"It's something that people just don't really know about," Fiedler said.

Said Payer, whose previous hip problems have led him to overcompensate on his right side: "I'm always interested in educating myself to know what different therapy there is out

there to get stronger and better."

Tortoriello said the biggest misconception is that he does the same work as a chiropractor or massage therapist.

"Everybody else treats the muscle tightness," said Tortoriello, who's developing his own business, Corrective Kinextions. "We look for the muscle weakness and treat the imbalances that hold the joint steadier."

It's all based on more than 300 neurological tests, during which the athlete lies on a table and Tortoriello locates the muscles not being stimulated by applying pressure with his fingers, testing and retesting until the muscle activates and range of motion improves.

Tortoriello worked on Fiedler five or six times during minicamps and preseason, with emphasis on his hip and shoulder, and Fiedler said he plans to continue the therapy during the season.

Said Fiedler: "You get more efficient use out of your whole body when all your muscles are working."

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